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ABSTRACT

Understanding complex communication processes and problems requires careful attention to all three facets of the rhetorical condition: audience, constraints, and exigence. Constraints that involve multicultural communication variables will require particular focus as instructors encourage the business student's ability to remain rhetorically sensitive. It is suggested that intercultural communication activities should be planned in order to learn to consider audiences more carefully. Two course projects that work well with college audiences are presented, including tips on facilitating classroom discussion and evaluating student efforts. A list of suggested intercultural business communication resources and exercises is appended. (VWL)

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INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION COURSEWORK DESIGNED TO PROMOTE RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY

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Intercultural Business Communication Coursework Designed to Promote Rhetorical Sensitivity

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Understanding complex communication processes and problems requires careful attention to all three facets of the rhetorical condition: audience, constraints, and exigence. Constraints which involve multicultural communication variables will require particular focus as instructors encourage the business student's ability to remain rhetorically sensitive. Because a good number of our students are just beginning to develop less ego-centered perspectives as they learn to consider audiences more carefully, intercultural communication activities should be planned with naive participants in mind. Assignments that allow students to analyze intercultural communication problems from a rhetorical perspective provide students with valuable, internalized concepts allowing them to communicate in the world marketplace.

Two course projects which work well with college audiences will be presented, including tips on facilitating classroom discussion and evaluating student efforts. Finally, a list of suggested intercultural business communication resources and exercises is appended.

Intercultural communication training objectives for adult audiences usually reflect these general goals: increased awareness of the individual's own culture, knowledge of other cultures, effective intercultural interaction coping strategies, and developing an ability to learn about oneself. College audiences present a challenge to trainers, their intercultural communication course instructors. Most enrollees are just entering stages of cognitive development requiring less ego-centered views and more self-analysis. They typically lack the organizational and social experiences that working professionals bring into the training session making simulations and role-plays productive. For that reason, choosing training exercises that will accomplish the same objectives but are adapted for naive participants is especially important for the college instructor.

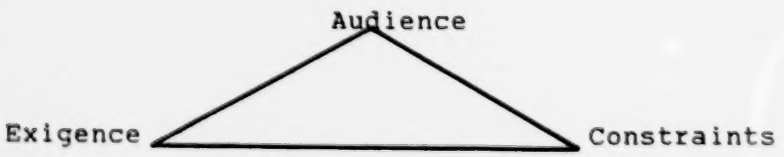
Beebe and Biggers (1986) found instructors rely on lecture as the primary teaching method in most introductory intercultural communication courses, followed by small group discussion, guest speakers, case studies, student reports, and field trips/videotaping (p. 57). Lecture appears the least effective intercultural communication teaching method, and is commonly referred to as "the university model;" however, a growing number of instructors prefer experiential or process methods. To be effective, small group exercises, case studies, and simulations should meet these criteria:

* Permit a rhetorical analysis of the communication problem presented in the exercise;

* Draw on students' knowledge and experiences to permit internalization of ideas and identification with behaviors evidenced in the exercise;
* Transmit a critical idea which participants can further apply in both cognitive and experiential domains.

Rhetorical Analyses

Understanding complex communication processes and problems begins with an analysis of the exigence, or motivation for communicating, the audience, and the constraints. Exigences based on intercultural interaction will generate more complex constraints. Perception, message creation, and message delivery are complicated by introducing cultural differentiation as a variable. The rhetorical framework, illustrated so well by Conrad (1989), below, can be used as a guiding model in exercise selection. Does the case study or simulation identify a communication problem experienced by the students themselves? Are constraints identifiable? Is the audience realistic and knowable?



Several games and simulations which purport to teach transferable communication skills or inspire cultural awareness and sensitivity rely on imaginary cultures, peoples, and conditions (Bafa Bafa, Star Power, Simsoc, etc.) While their value is undoubtedly positive, most instructors need an exercise that will accomplish a training objective in fifty minutes, involve students cognitively and behaviorally, and allow meaningful evaluation. The assignments suggested here may be presented in brief time periods but are flexible enough to modify, meet the criteria for rhetorical analysis, and achieve common intercultural communication course objectives. Most importantly, students are actively involved in the intercultural communication process.

Assignment I

Objective: Understanding Other Cultures/Subcultures

Participants: Young adults, a majority of whom are American business students.

Project: An analysis of a non-American culture or American subculture identifiable on the university campus.

Method: (Individuals or teams) Observation and interviews. Students must first prepare a cultural trait inventory to use while collecting data. Interview questions should be developed and dicussed in class before actual use.

Exigence: To learn about a culture from one of its members; to communicate successfully with the individual and elicit information needed.

Audience: Member(s) of culture; class, when reporting;

instructor.

Constraints: Interviewer's perceptual filters; status or territorial differences; social norms; time limitations; language differences; trust/mistrust; interviewer/ee's communication skills (listening as well as sending messages); preparation variables (interview questions appropriate?)

Outcomes: Presentations and major/minor reports are possible end products worthy of evaluation. A self-assessment of the interview itself should also be included, noting the interviewer's perception of its quality.

Assignment II

Objective: Understanding one's own culture

Participants: Young business students, a majority American

Project: To identify cultural traits targeted by advertisers in American market.

Method: Analyze print and video media used as channels for marketers; collect examples reflecting American values and assumptions, both in print and on videotape. Members of other cultures might be invited to the presentation of findings for a follow-up discussion.

Outcome: Presentation based on findings.

Exigence: To persuade class participants and instructor to accept ideas.

Audience: Classmates, invited guests and instructor

Constraints: Perceptual filters, time, communication skills.

References

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TASK II

As a group, you are to mark with a check the values below that your group supports and with an X those that you reject. Then the group must rank order the three (3) values that it supports most strongly with 1 being the value most strongly supported, 2 being next and 3 being the third most strongly supported. In the same way, the group must rank order the three (3) values most strongly rejected, with 1 being the most strongly rejected, 2 being the second most strongly rejected, and 3 the third.

You must achieve consensus on this task; you are not to use such techniques as averaging, majority rule or trading. You must work as a group without a designated leader. Your faculty chairperson will notify you when five minutes remain. Record the group's decisions as you go. (Total time: 20 minutes.)

It is valuable to:

_____ Get ahead.
_____ Be honest.
_____ Participate in government.
_____ Work hard.
_____ Be clean.
_____ Honor one's parents.
_____ Be loyal to one's country.
_____ Live.
_____ Be free.
_____ Pursue happiness.
_____ Accrue goods and wealth.
_____ Become educated.
_____ Be religious.
_____ Know the right people.
_____ Live in the right place.
_____ Be productive.
_____ Help one's fellow man.
_____ Be tolerant.
_____ Explore.
_____ Win.
_____ Look out for oneself.
_____ Obey the law.
_____ Influence other countries to become democratic.
_____ Be partisan.
_____ Know one's heritage.
_____ Build things.
_____ Save time.
_____ Find a better way.
_____ Be proud of one's city, state, and region.
_____ Adjust to the prevailing social norms.
_____ Stand up for what one thinks is right.

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